

Working with Middle-School Aged Youth

The most important advice that can be given to anyone working with middle-school aged youth is to treat them like equals, set expectations, and be excited! When these are firmly entrenched in a group dynamic, the focus can be on content and service and not management.

Equal Relationships

Do you remember a time when someone who was older or had authority over you, talked down to you or didn't treat you with respect? How did it make you feel? Did you want to go out of your way for that person? Middle-schoolers are particularly responsive if they are treated as equals and are respected. They are no longer children and can be sensitive when others treat them as if they are. They are wells of knowledge, ideas, and boundless energy, which can be tapped if facilitators build positive relationships.

Several ways to do so are:

- ⇒ Get to know them as individuals. Find out what they are passionate about in life.
- ⇒ Give them choices on the little things and if it is not detrimental to the group, let them make mistakes. They will learn more!
- ⇒ Respect their ideas and contributions.
- ⇒ And **never** use "...because I said so." Give a logical reason for actions.

Expectations

When beginning facilitation of the *Roadmap*, set expectations for your time together. This should be included as part of the Unit 1A Reflection "Creating a Safe Place". Clear expectations allow both facilitators and youth to operate in a comfortable, safe environment that fosters successful projects.

What are expectations?

They can take many forms, both concrete and abstract. For example, at the beginning you can sit down and brainstorm what actions are and are not acceptable together and create a contract that everyone signs. An example could be:

- ⇒ Respect all members of the group (time, property, or feelings)
- ⇒ Be responsible and timely when completing tasks for the group
- ⇒ Have fun while doing so

You can also discuss briefly the importance of creating expectations that everyone in the group understands and agrees upon. In this way, all youth will know what to expect and can be active participants in maintaining a safe space for everyone.

Be Excited!

Middle-schoolers know when you are bored or unexcited--and they will tune out! Find a way to personally tie-in to any parts of the curriculum that you may not be interested in so that you can be excited and enthusiastic when facilitating. The youth may think that you are a 'dork' but the excitement is often catching. The curriculum is full of activities geared toward to engaging youth, so try to keep that energy flowing during the lessons.